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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Turkey Time

A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Friday, November 24, 1933.

How do you do, Everybody:

Well, turkey seems to be the thing most on our minds this week. Turkey and how to get it all brown and luscious onto the table on Thanksgiving day. I've enjoyed reading your cards and letters asking for the directions for preparing and cooking turkey, that have come since Mr. Salisbury's announcements on Monday and Wednesday. Your messages make me feel as though we were next-door neighbors.

Of course, you're anxious to know how the turkey market is shaping up. I have news for you from headquarters. I've just been talking to Mr. Roy Potts and Mr. Rob Slocum of the poultry marketing division of Agricultural Economics. For us who want to buy turkeys, and news is good.

They say, "Yes, there are fine fat turkeys this fall, and plenty of 'em," "And they're selling at a reasonable price; that is reasonable for the consumer. For the people who raise them, well, that's another story. So far this year the price to growers for live turkeys in many places has been around ten cents a pound. A common retail price for a plump young bird picked but not drawn is 25 to 30 cents a pound this fall, according to reports coming in.

Mr. Slocum remarked that "prices like these almost take turkey out of the luxury class." And he reminded me of the days not so many years ago when it cost most of a five-dollar bill to buy the turkey for a Thanksgiving dinner. If you had good luck, your change just about paid for the cranberries. Today a five-dollar bill will buy the turkey and all the trimmings for a good home dinner, with plenty left over for another day. But neither Mr. Slocum or any of us are forgetting that there aren't so many five-dollar bills lying around loose right now.

Anyway that didn't seem to stop all of us in the United States from eating close to 20 million turkeys last year. Seems as though that taste of wild turkey the pioneers got whetted a lively national appetite.

I asked Mr. Slocum about the grading of turkeys this year, whether the Government graders are marking turkeys so that when we buy we can tell whether we're choosing a young or an old bird and be sure of the quality. He told me that thousands of turkeys are being graded right now according to the Government quality standards of Prime and Choice, but that these marks are going onto the wholesale package only. On the majority of the graded birds there's no mark that carries this information over to the consumer. This is a great pity, I think. Few of us buy more than two or three turkeys a year at most. Most of us are lucky if we get one. Naturally we can't be expert judges of turkey

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quality. I confess I'm one of those consumers who wants to have things graded and labeled so I know what I'm getting. I'd rather read labels than bother the storekeeper with a lot of questions.

For instance, it makes considerable difference in the cooking whether a turkey is young or old. A plump, young turkey with the fat showing here and there under the skin, cooks best in an open roaster. A turkey a year or more old is generally better in a covered roaster, after it is browned first.

In roasting turkey as in cooking all kinds of meat, controlling the oven temperature and keeping it moderate most of the time is just about the most important thing. I certainly realized this as I was roasting a turkey the other day. The high-school boy in the family said he couldn't wait until Thanksgiving for turkey, and besides, he said, there'd be so many around the table that day that he'd never get all the turkey he wanted. So his mother and I decided to give him a grand treat last Sunday. And it was appreciated all right. He tucked away three good helpings under his belt.

The turkey was a nice plump young one weighing a little over 8 pounds before it was drawn and including the head and feet. After I stuffed it with a savory bread crumb stuffing, and trussed it so that it was a good compact shape, I rubbed it with salt and butter, and patted it with flour. Then I put the turkey on a rack in an open roasting pan and laid some pieces of the turkey fat across the breast.

In the meantime the oven was heating. The oven thermometer registered just about 450° F. when I put the turkey in. You'll notice I didn't say anything about water in the pan. Don't think I forgot it. Water in a roasting pan only makes steam, and steam around a roasting turkey or any kind of tender meat draws out the juices. So our scientific meat cooks say, don't put water in the roasting pan.

At the end of half an hour in that hot oven the turkey was a light delicate brown all over. After the first 15 minutes, I'd turned it breast down and back up, and several times during the roasting I turned the turkey so the breast wouldn't brown too much. And by the way, searing doesn't hold in the juices as we used to think, it simply browns the outside and develops good flavor. Just as soon as the turkey was brown, I lowered the heat in the oven to moderate (between 350° and 325° F.) I left the oven door open as I was turning and basting the turkey with the pan drippings, so the oven would cool down quickly. I was using a gas stove. If I'd been using a coal range or some other stove where I couldn't change the oven temperature quickly, I'd have kept the temperature moderate all the time. This moderate oven heat cooks a turkey through slowly, evenly, without burning the outside, or drying out the juices inside. And the pan drippings are rich brown, not the least bit burned, and just right for making gravy. My young 8-pound turkey went into the oven at 11:30 and was tender and done at 1:30, just 2 hours' roasting time. This was about 15 minutes to the pound for the weight as we bought it with the head and feet on and before it was drawn.

I'm sorry I can't go into all the other fine points on roasting a turkey today. If you'd like the full directions for cooking a turkey and for making a savory stuffing, I'll be glad to send them to you. Send me your name and address right away and we'll try to get them to you in time for Thanksgiving. We'll do our best. And goodbye for this time.